

An Initiative of:



ISSUE BRIEF

CAFA

Community Action to Fight Asthma



Improving Environments for Children with Asthma

What is CAFA?

In 2002, The California Endowment launched the Community Action to Fight Asthma (CAFA) Initiative. The goal of the initiative is to empower communities to reduce the environmental risk factors for children's asthma. The Endowment funds the statewide network that works to influence and change policy at state and local levels and reduce the disparities in asthma prevalence. CAFA is comprised of 12 local coalitions (consisting of community members, teachers, parents, environmental advocates and health care advocates from all areas of the state) and technical assistance partners. CAFA uses educational and programmatic activities to advocate for improvements in policies related to housing, outdoor air and schools.

Asthma in California

Californians are disproportionately likely to suffer from asthma. The national asthma prevalence rate is about 12 percent for children under 18 and about 9 percent for adults². In California, 14 percent of children aged 1-11 and 19 percent of children aged 12-17 have the disease.

However, the disparities are larger within California. Some areas of the Central Valley have a 16 percent asthma rate and an African-American child is one-third more likely to have asthma than a White child.

California Asthma Prevalence Rates by Age and Ethnicity¹

GROUP	AGES 1-11	AGES 12-17
Overall Total	14%	19%
Black	21%	27%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	15%	32%
Asian	11%	15%
Latino	13%	16%
White	14%	19%

¹ Health of California's Adults, Adolescents, and Children: Findings from CHIS 2003 and CHIS 2001 (June 2006).

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Health Interview Survey and National Center for Health Statistics data. <http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/slides/prevalence06.ppt#3054>, Adult and Child Asthma Prevalence United States, 1997-2004, retrieved April 2, 2007.



Asthma Environmental Triggers

HOUSING

Tobacco smoke, Allergens, Mold,
Cleaning products and pesticides,
Pests, Pets, Dust, Paints

OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY

Diesel exhaust from transportation
vehicles and ports, Agricultural crop dusting
and/or use of pesticides, Ozone

SCHOOLS

Old or inappropriately used ventilation
systems, Carpets or couches,
Animals in classrooms

This problem is not just one of health or equality. Economically, asthma takes a considerable toll. The disease costs California about \$1.3 billion per year, with Medi-Cal paying about 45 percent of the cost of care for children³. Additionally, asthma is the leading cause of school absences among all chronic conditions. The California Department of Health Services estimates that in 2001, schools lost almost \$41 million from preventable absences due to asthma from children ages 12 to 17 alone⁴. Childhood asthma can financially hurt individual families as well – parents who must stay home to take care of ill children are at risk for lost wages or jobs.

Environmental Triggers of Asthma

These disparities and costs can be reduced through asthma prevention and by limiting the impact of environmental triggers.

Asthma episodes are influenced by environmental and social factors (left). Indoor exposures have become increasingly important as children spend more time indoors and as buildings are more insulated to increase energy efficiency. Low-quality housing also increases indoor exposure risks.

Outdoor air can trigger asthma episodes, especially among those living near freeways, ports, power plants or refineries.⁵ Additional factors, such as the increase in childhood obesity, decreased opportunities for physical activity and reduced exposure to microbes in early life, are also considered potential antecedents to asthma.

Outcomes of CAFA

The CAFA Initiative targeted specific issues in the childhood asthma problem and its work yielded significant results:

- Creation of a cohesive statewide network of local coalitions;
- Clarification of the coalitions' focus on environmental triggers caused by outdoor air quality, schools and housing;
- Expansion of local coalitions' activities and skills to include higher-level policy, advocacy and communication work;

³ Allergy and Asthma Foundation of America, 1998.

⁴ California Department of Health Services. *Guidelines for the Management of Asthma in California Schools: A comprehensive resource for school health and other personnel to address asthma in the school setting*, April 2004.

⁵ American Lung Association <http://www.cleanairchoice.org/outdoor/AsthmaFreeway.asp>

- Increase in credibility and external influence, which allowed coalitions to teach community members to advocate for themselves;
- Increase in policymakers' knowledge of environmental triggers of asthma (right);

These outcomes are all admirable on their own, but the most significant result has been the CAFA coalitions' ability to shift the focus of the childhood asthma discussion from traditional medical treatment to community-based, preventative solutions. This is a major development in the efforts to reduce the impact of asthma on school-aged children, their families and their communities.

Sustainable Funding

Generally, more developed Coalitions (defined as having more experienced leadership and more infrastructure) applied for and received larger amounts of outside funding than did newer and/or less developed Coalitions. There were, however, some exceptions. Factors such as specific experience in grantsmanship, available technical assistance, contacts with funding agencies and the availability of funding had a substantial impact on the success of grant applications. For example, one of the less developed Coalitions received substantial grant support from a large, local, community-committed health plan by having the foresight to include an influential member of the plan on the Coalition's advisory board.

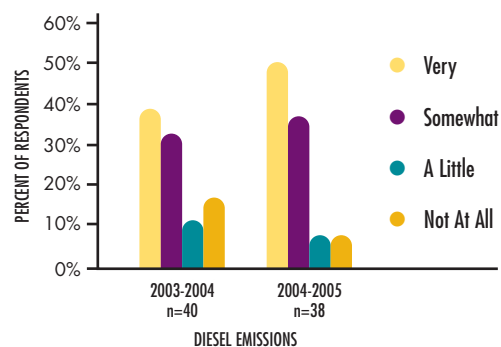
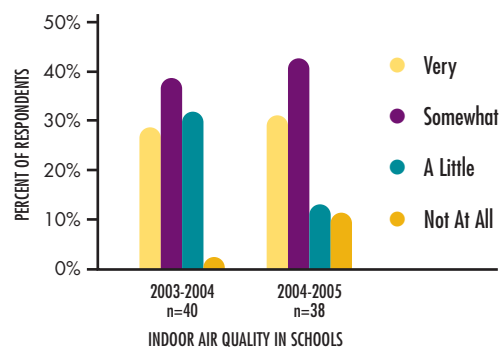
Conclusions

As part of the CAFA Initiative, local coalitions made remarkable progress in three years. The coalitions learned critical lessons about educating and providing communities with tools for advocacy, finding and working with strategic allies, communicating with policymakers and understanding the local, regional and statewide policy processes. Local coalitions continue to be instrumental in raising awareness of the relationship between asthma and environmental triggers in outdoor air, schools and homes, as well as addressing the health disparities, social and economic costs associated with asthma.

Increasing Policymaker Awareness

One of CAFA's goals is to raise awareness of asthma's environmental triggers among people who can make real change. Policymakers were interviewed in 2003-2004 and again in 2004-2005 about their familiarity with asthma's triggers in homes, schools and outdoor air. In the second survey, policymakers were noticeably more likely to report that they were either "somewhat" or "very familiar" with those triggers than they were one year earlier, especially regarding outdoor air. Policymakers specifically credited coalitions for their increased knowledge.

Policymaker Familiarity with Air Quality Issues Related to Asthma



Policymakers said they want to continue to work on environmental issues. They are eager for more data from the coalitions on topics such as the prevalence and trends of asthma in their communities, economic impacts and costs to society and individuals, asthma's relationship to other chronic illnesses and asthma's relationship to urban planning issues.

CAFA Coalitions' Local, Regional and State Policy Activities and Accomplishments

Outdoor Air Quality

- Advocacy against 710 freeway expansion near schools (in Long Beach and Los Angeles);
- Notification of communities regarding oil refinery “flare” releases (in the Bay Area);
- Expanding the use of air quality flags to notify communities of bad air days (in the Central Valley);
- Los Angeles and Long Beach port pollution control;
- Replacement of diesel buses;
- Fine port terminals when trucks idle for excessive periods of time;
- Remove the exemption for agricultural sources of pollution from the Clean Air Act;
- Penalize those responsible for pesticide poisonings and require development of protocols for responding to pesticide drift;
- California Air Resources Board (CARB) diesel software upgrade ruling (affected 60,000 trucks across the state); and
- CARB regulation to reduce diesel truck idling and to reduce automakers greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

Schools

- Prohibit building schools next to freeways;
- Use green construction in new schools; and
- Ensure that students have access to their asthma medications while in school.

Other

- Asthma treatment care requires health plans to provide spacers and peak flow meters;
- Ensure that health plans cover outpatient prescription drug benefits, and
- Bill to allow self-administration of auto-injectable epinephrine.

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